

NEGOTIATION

Fall-Winter
1994-1995

Newsletter



Jared Curhan, founder and executive director of the Program for Young Negotiators, teaches negotiation skills to middle school students.

Young Negotiators

A young man in college was excited about the field of negotiation and had a long-standing interest in teaching young people. He looked for a program that teaches negotiation to kids. Finding none, he started his own.

That is how Jared Curhan, at the time a senior at Harvard College, founded the Program for Young Negotiators. This year the program will teach negotiation to 20 classrooms of middle school children in the Boston Public School System.

"There were excellent programs on mediation for young people and on violence prevention, but no one was teaching negotiation as a life-skill that could be helpful in all kinds of situations," said Curhan. "We want to give kids tools that they can use to accomplish their goals. At the same time, we are trying to show how negotiation can be an alternative to violence."

The program was piloted last year in Charlestown, Massachusetts, and, with the help of two additional full-time staff members, will be expanded this year to several Boston public schools. Somewhat surprisingly, there was virtually no hesitation on the part of school principals and teachers, who might have been put off by the added work and the disruption to the regular schedule, of including a new course in the curriculum.

"Educators welcomed the program," Curhan said. "Much of their time is taken up with handling disciplinary matters and with helping students try to resolve conflicts. They are thrilled that we can give students some tools to work through these conflicts."

The first step, according to Curhan, is for kids to "develop the ability to walk in their adversary's shoes. It's a hard thing to do, especially when you're 13 or 14, but eventually you discover that it pays dividends."

What was the reaction of students? John D. Dennehy, assistant principal of the Charlestown school where the program was introduced, wrote: "In my 27 years of teaching, this is one of the first times that I have seen a class truly excited about a new program and about taking on new responsibilities. It is through these very types of programs that we can train our students with a skill that they will be able to put to practical use in their later life, both at home and at work."

The program, which is a division of the non-profit Consensus Building Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, trains teachers and volunteers, develops curriculum materials, and finds corporate sponsors to fund the individual projects. Howard Raiffa, director emeritus of the PON Negotiation Roundtable, is chair of the Program for Young Negotiator's advisory board, and PON's executive director, Marjorie Corman Aaron, and chair of the Steering Committee Robert H. Mnookin are on the board. Stuart Rankin, manager of the PON Clear-

inghouse, is a teaching assistant.

Funding for the Program for Young Negotiators has come from a variety of sources, including Keane, Inc., the Boston Foundation, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard Business School, Shawmut Bank, the Dewing Foundation, the Stuart Foundation, and local law firms and community businesses.

It is the hope of Jared Curhan that the program will be a prototype for schools in other states. For more information, contact: Jared R. Curhan, Executive Director, Program for Young Negotiators, The Consensus Building Institute, Inc., 131 Mt. Auburn Street, Cambridge, MA 02138; (617) 492-1414. ■
